ALBERTA WATER COUNCIL

Moving from Words to Actions

Recommendations to improve communication, coordination and collaboration between and among Water for Life partnerships

JUNE 2011

About the Alberta Water Council

The Alberta Water Council is a multi-stakeholder partnership with members from governments, industry and non-government organizations. All members have a stake in water. The Alberta Water Council is one of three types of partnerships established under the *Water for Life* strategy: the others are Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils and Watershed Stewardship Groups.

The Alberta Water Council regularly reviews implementation progress of the *Water for Life* strategy and champions the achievement of the strategy's goals. The Council also advises the Government of Alberta, stakeholders and the public on effective water management practices and solutions to water issues, as well as on priorities for water research. Where there is consensus, the Council may advise on government policy and legislation. However, the Government of Alberta remains accountable for the implementation of the *Water for Life* strategy and continues to administer water and watershed management activities throughout the province.

Alberta Water Council
14th Floor, Petroleum Plaza South Tower
9915 – 108 Street
Edmonton, AB T5K 2G8

Tel: 780.644.7380
Fax: 780.644.7382

Email: info@awchome.ca
Web: www.awchome.ca

Contents

Executive Summary 1

1.0 Introduction 4
1.1 Background 4
1.2 The Project 4
1.3 Project Scope 5

2.0 Findings and Recommendations 6
2.1 The WFL Partnership System 6
2.2 Current Methods of Communication 10
2.3 Key Areas for Collaboration 11
2.3.1 Partnerships and the Adaptive Management Approach 12
2.3.2 Developing Water Policy 13
2.4 WFL Implementation Challenges 17

Conclusion 18

Acronyms and Abbreviations 19

Appendix 1 — Team Membership 20

Appendix 2 — List of Communication Tools Used by WFL Partnerships 21

Appendix 3 — WFL Implementation Challenges 22
3.1 Nesting Watershed and other Planning Initiatives 22
3.2 Protecting Aquatic Areas 23
3.3 Promoting Best Management Practices 24
3.4 Sharing Knowledge about New and Emerging Issues 24

Appendix 4 — Lead and Timelines for Recommendation Implementation 25

List of Figures

Figure 1. Contributors to the successful implementation of Water for Life 7
Figure 2. Areas of common interest and areas of overlap 10

Executive Summary

Good communication processes are the basis for sharing information and for understanding and working together effectively to achieve shared priorities. The purpose of this project was to improve processes for communication, coordination and collaboration between and among *Water for Life* (WFL) partnerships to identify and more effectively address shared strategic priorities.

WFL partnerships already communicate a great deal between and among themselves. However, communication processes need to be improved to provide more strategic opportunities for all three partnerships to discuss and resolve issues related to WFL implementation. Once the Alberta Water Council's recommendations are implemented, WFL partnerships will have a more robust process for communicating, coordinating and collaborating. This communication platform may help to address WFL implementation challenges and improve future cooperation among partnerships such that WFL outcomes are successfully achieved.

While the report includes a number of recommendations by subject area, recommendations are listed below by the entity responsible to initiate the action even if the action involves others. These entities are the Alberta Stewardship Network (ASN) on behalf of Watershed Stewardship Groups (WSGs); Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs); the Alberta Water Council (AWC); and the Government of Alberta (GOA).

Implementation Lead: ASN

Recommendation 13 (page 15) — To support WSGs to identify shared or common issues, *we recommend that the ASN use its needs assessment process, annual workshop, or other mechanisms to provide a forum for discussion of WSG water issues, and to encourage WSGs to work with their WPAC on bringing these issues forward annually.*

Recommendation 14 (page 16) — To strengthen its role as a support tool for the WSG community and the WFL partnership system, *we recommend that the ASN continue to provide a portal for WSGs to access information on other partnership activities in Alberta and beyond, and that they continue to showcase to other partnerships and to the broader provincial and national stewardship community, the good work of Alberta's stewardship groups and how it supports the achievement of WFL on an ongoing basis.*

Implementation Lead: WPACs

Recommendation 11 (page 15) — To ensure that WSGs have the opportunity to provide input on shared water issues, *we recommend that each WPAC develop a mechanism within the next year to engage and seek input from the WSGs in their watershed.*

Recommendation 12 (page 15) — To prioritize issues common across watersheds, *we recommend that the WPACs collectively develop a process within the next 18 months to determine which issues are appropriate to take forward to the AWC for consideration.*

Implementation Lead: AWC

Recommendation 7 (page 13) — To improve input from all partnerships on WFL implementation progress, *we recommend that the AWC work with the ASN and WSG community to develop, communicate and facilitate a formal process within six months of approval of this report to solicit input from WSGs for the WFL Implementation Review process.*

Recommendation 8 (page 14) — To improve awareness of its processes for gathering policy input, *we recommend that the AWC inform its members, other WFL partnerships and other sectors and stakeholders about their processes for bringing issues forward within six months of approval of this report.*

Recommendation 15 (page 16) — To improve opportunities for WSG input on water issues, *we recommend that the AWC work with the ASN and the WSG community to develop a process within six months of report approval to select members to represent WSGs on AWC project teams, where appropriate.*

Implementation Lead: GOA

Recommendation 2 (page 8) — To better communicate WFL implementation progress and the "partnership story," *we recommend that the GOA coordinate with the partnerships to produce a biennial WFL implementation progress report in an appropriate format, and that these reports include, to the extent possible, all major contributions by governments, partnerships and sectors to the achievement of WFL. The GOA and its partners are also encouraged to report more frequently on their progress using a variety of means including web updates, verbal updates to the Alberta Water Council, etc.*

Recommendation 3 (page 9) — To build public and sector awareness about the value of the WFL partnership system, *we recommend that the GOA work with the partnerships to develop and implement a marketing strategy to promote WFL and the work of its partnerships to a broad spectrum of sectors, stakeholders and the public (i.e. promote the partnership brand). This should be commenced within six months.*

Recommendation 6 (page 12) — To improve the adaptive management approach to implementing WFL, *we recommend that the GOA work with the partnerships to jointly develop a formal process for periodic meetings, starting with an initial meeting with focussed representation to be held annually, for the purpose of identifying shared areas of concern, opportunities for collaboration and redundancies.*

Implementation Lead: All

Recommendation 1 (page 7) — To strengthen communications between all WFL partnerships and to ensure their stories are "out there" for others to access, *we recommend that the GOA and each WFL partnership, where appropriate, commit resources where available to build and/or update their own websites regularly (at least twice per year), posting appropriate materials such as data and reports as soon as they are available.*

Recommendation 4 (page 9) — To increase awareness and understanding of the role of the WFL partnerships, their progress on WFL implementation, and their knowledge needs, *we recommend that the GOA and the partnerships starting in 2012 jointly discuss organization of a biennial "partnerships update and shared learnings" session.*

Recommendation 5 (page 11) — To improve general awareness about each other's activities, *we recommend that each partnership, within six months of approval of this report, direct the reader to a partnership page on their own website that provides links to the other WFL partnerships websites.*

Recommendation 9 (page 14) — To improve reporting on how policy recommendations have been considered, *we recommend that any sector receiving recommendations from the AWC, WPACs and any other source, provide an annual update to its WFL partnerships indicating what policy recommendations it has received in the past and what action has been taken.*

Recommendation 10 (page 14) — To broaden awareness of the partnership role to provide recommendations to the GOA on policy and watershed planning, *we recommend that the AWC, WPACs and WSGs annually (starting in 2012) communicate GOA responses to their recommendations to a broader sector audience of affected stakeholders by posting responses on their website and generally making them available upon request with the understanding that the other partnerships will also share this information with their memberships.*

1.0 Introduction

Because the people who are immediately affected by specific water issues can also more directly and effectively find solutions to address them, Water for Life is a shared responsibility through a network of partnerships, use of outcome-based approaches, and collaboration in delivery of services. The Water for Life partnerships are an important vehicle through which Water for Life goals are achieved.

Water for Life, A Renewal (2008)

1.1 Background

Water for Life: a strategy for sustainability is the Government of Alberta's guidance document for water management. The strategy was launched in 2003 and renewed in 2008 and a new action plan was released in 2009. The renewed strategy continues to identify **partnerships** as a key mechanism for achieving the goals and outcomes.[1] Three types of partnerships were identified in the strategy: local Watershed Stewardship Groups (WSGs), regional Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs), and the provincial Alberta Water Council (AWC).

The AWC provides a forum for sectors and *Water for Life* (WFL) partnerships to come together to discuss and find innovative solutions to shared water management issues. One issue that has proven challenging for the WFL partnerships is effective communication that enables collaboration and the coordination of mutually beneficial actions for the successful implementation of WFL.

1.2 The Project

The Council's 2008 report, *Strengthening Partnerships*, elaborated on these communication challenges and recommended that *"the Alberta Water Council work with WPACs and WSGs to improve the information exchange and alignment of outcomes among partnerships."* At its 2010 Business Planning workshop, the AWC established a new project team to address this issue; project team members are listed in Appendix 1. The *Strengthening Partnerships* report provided direction for the terms of reference that guided this new project team.[2]

Good communication processes are the basis for sharing information and for understanding and working together effectively to achieve mutual priorities. The purpose of this project was to improve communication, coordination and collaboration between and among WFL partnerships in order to identify and more effectively address shared strategic priorities.

---

1 For more information about the *Water for Life* strategy, see http://www.waterforlife.alberta.ca

2 For information about the *Strengthening Partnerships* report, see http://www.albertawatercouncil.ca/Projects/SharedGovernanceandWatershedPlanningFramework/tabid/101/Default.aspx.

1.3 Project Scope

The project recognized the unique and important roles played by WSGs, WPACs and the AWC as well as the Government of Alberta and another partner, the Alberta Stewardship Network. The recommendations in this report were developed with each of these players in mind.

The Government of Alberta (GOA) is ultimately accountable for water management in Alberta, and is also a key supporter of the partnerships that contribute to the successful implementation of WFL.

The Alberta Stewardship Network (ASN) is a major program of the Land Stewardship Centre of Canada and supports the work of WSGs.[3] The ASN mission is *to provide Alberta's stewards with a network that facilitates information exchange, provides support, and recognizes the contribution of individuals, communities and organizations in advancing environmental stewardship on a watershed basis.*

While the project focused on the three WFL partnerships, the Alberta Water Council acknowledges that many agencies and organizations are making substantial contributions to achieving WFL goals and outcomes, including municipalities, industry, environmental and conservation non-government organizations, communities, and individuals. Many of these players are working within and outside the WFL partnership system, and some have been recognized by programs such as the Emerald Awards and the ASN Stewardship awards.[4]

During the course of the project, several important WFL implementation challenges were identified that are beyond the project scope. These challenges are described in this report and will be forwarded to the AWC *WFL Implementation Review Committee* for consideration.

Municipalities and Water for Life

The City of Edmonton has invested heavily to protect the North Saskatchewan River from its discharges particularly at the Gold Bar Wastewater Treatment Plant. This world class plant was built in 1956 and upgraded in 1971, 1981, 1998 and 2009. The early focus was on reducing oxygen-depleting substances. In the 1990s, the plant was upgraded to tertiary treatment, cutting phosphorous and nitrogen loads by 75%. With wastewater treatment largely taken care of, the City turned its sights on improving stormwater quality. In 2010 the Kennedale wetland was completed to improve the quality of water discharged to the river from a major north Edmonton watershed. A filter facility is being completed to clean the flows from the Groat Road storm sewer, and this should be operational in 2011.

3 For more information about the ASN, see http://www.ab.stewardshipcanada.ca

4 For more information on these awards see http://www.emeraldfoundation.ca and http://www.ab.stewardshipcanada.ca/index.php/grassroots_env_stewardship_awards.

The Oldman Watershed Council Reaches Out!

The Oldman Watershed Council connects with its community stakeholders through its Rural, Urban and Watershed Science Teams. Each team includes a WPAC Board member and several sectors (e.g. municipalities, non-government organizations, academia, and stewards). The Urban Team promotes good urban landscape, storm water management and water conservation. The Rural Team builds capacity for rural stewardship. The Watershed Science Team facilitates discussion among research agencies. More information about this WPAC is available at http://www.oldmanbasin.org.

Working together to Improve Knowledge

To build its capacity for improving and sharing knowledge, the South East Alberta Watershed Alliance (SEAWA) has worked with the Medicine Hat College and Alberta Association of Colleges & Technical Institutes to provide significant funding for research. This partnership has enabled SEAWA to use community-based research for 15 technical reports about this watershed. For more information, see http://www.seawa.ca.

2.0 Findings and Recommendations

Communication is a key activity for all WFL partnerships, requiring substantial human and financial resources. This report features sidebar examples of successful communication and collaboration strategies between WFL partnerships, GOA and other sectors and stakeholders working to implement the WFL strategy.

Communications may be directed to the public, to the members of each partnership, and between partnerships. To focus on areas where improved communications are needed to better achieve the outcomes of WFL, the following areas were examined:

- The WFL Partnership System (Section 2.1);
- Current methods of communication (Section 2.2);
- Key areas for collaboration (Section 2.3); and
- WFL implementation challenges (Section 2.4).

2.1 The WFL Partnership System

All Albertans affect the management of our water resources, and all can contribute to improving management practices. Thus it is important that all Albertans have the opportunity to be engaged in WFL. Partnerships are a way to engage a diversity of individuals and sectors in achieving the WFL strategy.

The WFL partnership system is composed of the provincial AWC, 11 regional WPACs and approximately 140 local WSGs. The partnerships typically include stakeholders representing governments, industries, non-government organizations, Aboriginal and other communities, and members of the public. At present, more than 1,000 Albertans are working directly under the banner of WFL. Through their sector networks, these WFL champions are influencing thousands more (Figure 1).

Individuals
Can conserve water at home and at work.
Government of Alberta
Works with others to implement WFL
Communities
Can promote water conservation and protect local rivers.
Water for Life Implementation Progress
AWC
Reviews WFL implementation; makes policy recommendations.
Sectors
Use beneficial practises, improve water infrastructure, develop conservation plans, etc.
11 WPACs
Meet to discuss regional issues or prioritize shared issues to take to the AWC.
140+ WSGs
Meet to discuss and resolve local watershed issues or take shared issues forward to their WPAC.

Figure 1. Contributors to the successful implementation of Water for Life

However, for Albertans and their various sectors to participate in the WFL partnerships, they need to see the value and the results of their efforts. Both the GOA and the partnerships can communicate the value and societal benefits of WFL and the partnership system. Each WFL partnership should endeavour to "tell its story" about how it is contributing to WFL and how interested stakeholders can get involved. One way of ensuring stories are "out there" for others to access is to keep partnership websites up to date.

Recommendation 1

To strengthen communications between all WFL partnerships and to ensure their stories are "out there" for others to access, *we recommend that the GOA and each WFL partnership, where appropriate, commit resources where available to build and/or update their own websites regularly (at least twice per year), posting appropriate materials such as data and reports as soon as they are available.*

Recommendation 1 recognizes that many WSGs may not have the capacity to host a website, or they may be isolated and challenged by a lack of internet and email services. Assistance may be needed to support this activity or to help with alternative communication services that best fit with WSG needs. The ASN provides some assistance to WSGs,[5] but other communication service options may be needed to support online communication tools in some areas.

Additionally, information on individual partnerships needs to be "rolled up" into a story of how, together, we are making progress on implementing WFL and achieving its outcomes. This information needs to be put together at regular intervals, and then shared with Albertans so they can be confident that progress is being made on WFL and strategy outcomes are being achieved.

Reporting on the achievement of WFL outcomes is an auditing function of the GOA that assists the government in planning, reporting, and other activities. For this reason, Alberta Environment should play a lead role in WFL reporting, but partnerships should also contribute to the reporting process because they contribute to achieving WFL outcomes.

Recommendation 2

To better communicate WFL implementation progress and the "partnership story," *we recommend that the GOA coordinate with the partnerships to produce a biennial WFL implementation progress report in an appropriate format, and that these reports include, to the extent possible, all major contributions by governments, partnerships and sectors to the achievement of WFL. The GOA and its partners are also encouraged to report more frequently on their progress using a variety of means including web updates, verbal updates to the Alberta Water Council, etc.*

To keep the partnership system and its network of sectors growing and contributing to the achievement of WFL, effective internal communications between partnerships, and external communications from the partnerships out to the public, sectors, and stakeholders are essential. Good communication will encourage sector and community support of the partnerships as well as participation in water and watershed policy, planning and stewardship initiatives. Getting the message out about the good work of the partnerships will keep existing sectors engaged and will attract new sectors to the table. For example, WPACs, as multi-stakeholder organizations, need effective communication with the member sectors in their basin for input on the development of their *State of the Watershed Reports* and *Integrated Watershed Management Plans*.

All the partnerships need to make sure that all the sectors that need to be involved in water or watershed management are involved. Those sitting on partnership boards also need to ensure

5 For information on ASN web page assistance for WSGs, see http://www.ab.stewardshipcanada.ca/index.php/stewardship_group_web_pages).

they are a) communicating back to their sectors, and b) bringing their sector's views forward to the partnership. Many board members undertake this sector outreach by working with umbrella organizations and/or building the appropriate networks.

To promote WFL and the work of its partnerships, the GOA could utilize existing mechanisms that effectively reach a sector or sectors and/or the general public (i.e., those not already engaged in WFL), such as Environment Week, Alberta's Environment Conference, articles in rural weekly papers, or updates on the WFL website. The GOA and the WFL partnerships can help improve sector participation by promoting the WFL "brand."

Recommendation 3

To build public and sector awareness about the value of the WFL partnership system, *we recommend that the GOA work with the partnerships to develop and implement a marketing strategy to promote WFL and the work of its partnerships to a broad spectrum of sectors, stakeholders and the public (i.e. promote the partnership brand). This should be commenced within six months.*

To effectively communicate a shared message externally, the GOA and the partnerships need to understand each other's roles and responsibilities and, collectively, evaluate progress. Improved internal communication will also lead to more opportunities for collaboration and less duplication of effort. While each partnership does many things, there are areas of overlap where they have shared priorities and their activities can be complementary (see Figure 2). In these areas, improved communication and collaboration could improve WFL implementation progress. To enhance their understanding of how each partnership is contributing to WFL, the partnerships need to get together periodically to share information.

Recommendation 4

To increase awareness and understanding of the role of the WFL partnerships, their progress on WFL implementation, and their knowledge needs, *we recommend that the GOA and the partnerships starting in 2012 jointly discuss organization of a biennial "partnerships update and shared learnings" session.*

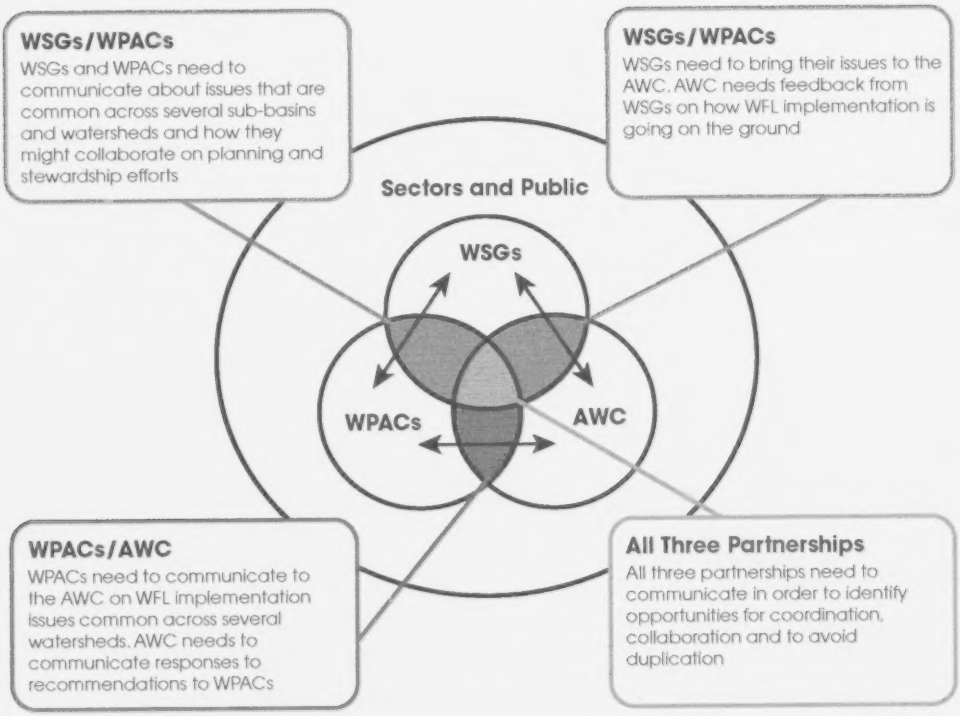
WSGs/WPACs
WSGs and WPACs need to communicate about issues that are common across several sub-basins and watersheds and how they might collaborate on planning and stewardship efforts
WSGs/WPACs
WSGs need to bring their issues to the AWC. AWC needs feedback from WSGs on how WFL implementation is going on the ground
Sectors and Public
WSGs
WPACs
AWC
WPACs/AWC
WPACs need to communicate to the AWC on WFL implementation issues common across several watersheds. AWC needs to communicate responses to recommendations to WPACs
All Three Partnerships
All three partnerships need to communicate in order to identify opportunities for coordination, collaboration and to avoid duplication

Figure 2. Areas of common interest and areas of overlap

2.2 Current Methods of Communication

Each partnership is presently putting effort and resources into several types of single-direction communications using traditional tools such as brochures, websites, displays, newsletters, and annual reports (Appendix 2). While this type of communication is important for making partnership information accessible to others, it is somewhat static in that it does not allow for two-way dialogue. Partnerships have also started to use social media such as Facebook, Twitter and other more interactive communication tools to reach an audience that may not be engaged through more traditional communication methods.

Some communication processes are also in place for more interactive exchange of information between two or more partnerships. These include invitations to make presentations to or participate on boards or committees; formal and informal interpersonal exchanges at special events like the WPAC Summit or Stewards-in-Motion workshop; and cross-posting of newsletters and other materials.

Some partnerships are also using approaches that could be useful to other partnerships. These include the collective work by WPACs to identify their technical needs; and the ASN's assessment of WSG needs. However, other partnerships may not be aware of these mechanisms or events, and meeting summaries or reports generated by one partnership may not be shared with others. To improve awareness about important events and initiatives, each partnership should ensure its announcements are available to other WFL partnerships.

Recommendation 5

To improve general awareness about each other's activities, *we recommend that each partnership, within six months of approval of this report, direct the reader to a partnership page on their own website that provides links to the other WFL partnerships websites.*

2.3 Key Areas for Collaboration

Few examples currently exist of communication processes involving all three partnerships at a strategic level; the *Moving from Words to Actions* project is one of the first such initiatives. Admittedly, each partnership is designed to do specific things. The AWC is designed to seek stakeholder advice on the development of provincial water policy. WPACs focus on watershed assessment and planning in their regions. WSGs can undertake a range of activities in their local watershed.

Nevertheless, some areas that are common or complementary to all partnerships do exist. For example, a goal of WFL is "healthy aquatic ecosystems," and all partnerships have contributed to this goal. The AWC has provided policy advice on a definition of aquatic ecosystems and what is meant by "healthy." WPACs are determining which aquatic ecosystems are healthy, or not, through their watershed assessments. WSGs are actively restoring damaged areas. Although all three partnerships play an integral part in achieving this outcome, there are few opportunities for them to discuss their work, what challenges they are encountering, and how implementation is proceeding. In particular, the partnerships need to get together to discuss areas of overlap that affect all three partnerships including:

- Achieving the shared outcomes of the WFL strategy using an adaptive management approach of planning, implementing and evaluating progress; and
- Supporting the development of good water policy, to guide water management activities by all partnerships at a local, regional and provincial scale.

What is the WPAC Summit?

Once a year, WPACs get together at the WPAC Summit to share their stories and what they've learned with each other and invited guests. This event provides an effective forum for WPACs to share knowledge and to discuss common issues they are encountering in implementing WFL in their watersheds.

Getting Together for WFL!

An annual workshop is held to bring together representatives from WPACs, WSGs, GOA and other interested stakeholders in the South Saskatchewan Watershed. This workshop provides an opportunity for each group to update the others on its activities and for the GOA and AWC to inform and seek input on provincial policy issues and strategies. The workshop is an important networking opportunity. It is a valuable communication tool for WFL partners working at local, regional and provincial scales. Expanding this to be a provincial gathering would benefit all the WFL partnerships throughout the province!

2.3.1 Partnerships and the Adaptive Management Approach

Although the success of *Water for Life* is a shared responsibility, the GOA is ultimately the lead in implementing the WFL strategy. When the strategy was first released in 2003, it included an action plan to guide its implementation and the GOA periodically reports on implementation progress. In 2008, the GOA reviewed its progress and adjusted its course in some areas before releasing a new action plan. This iterative, adaptive management approach allows new and emerging issues to be factored into planning.

The GOA recognizes that for WFL to succeed, the WFL partnerships need to support this adaptive management approach of planning and assessing progress. Implementation will be improved through the use of communication strategies and tools for engaging all partnerships in strategic planning discussions and, where beneficial, coordinating activities to achieve WFL outcomes. Through their outreach with stakeholders and the public, the WFL partnerships can bring a number of perspectives to the planning process, strengthening the strategy as it moves forward.

While this happens now on an *ad hoc* basis, there is no formal process to bring all three partnerships together. A joint session could enhance understanding of individual and collective strategic directions, including who is doing what to achieve WFL outcomes in the short and medium term. The output of such a meeting may include, but would not be limited to, prioritized lists of WFL implementation challenges, water policy gaps, technical needs, new and emerging water policy issues and a schedule of future partnership meetings. To help make the meeting effective, representation would have to be kept to a manageable number. In particular, the WSGs and WPACs would have to develop a process to select their representatives, perhaps using a regional or watershed approach. The responsibility for hosting the meeting could be rotated, as is done for the WPAC Summit.

Recommendation 6

To improve the adaptive management approach to implementing WFL, *we recommend that the GOA work with the partnerships to jointly develop a formal process for periodic meetings, starting with an initial meeting with focussed representation to be held annually, for the purpose of identifying shared areas of concern, opportunities for collaboration and redundancies.*

To ensure an understanding of the individual and collective strategic direction (who is doing what), a summary report of the meeting should be produced by the host and circulated broadly in a timely manner to members of each partnership as well as to other sectors and stakeholders. This report will inform the partnerships as they develop their individual strategic and operational workplans. As well, all partnerships should post information about their workplans on their websites to facilitate collaboration and sharing of information.

On the assessment side, the AWC regularly reviews the implementation progress of the WFL strategy to highlight strengths, identify weaknesses and recommend areas where additional focus would enable implementation to advance more effectively.[6] In the past, the WPAC community has been engaged in this review. WSGs also play a key role in on-the-ground implementation and should similarly be engaged in assessing progress. Currently, the process for WSGs to provide input to the AWC WFL implementation review process is unclear or not well communicated or facilitated. In the near future, it is important that the AWC involve WSGs in this activity.

Recommendation 7

To improve input from all partnerships on WFL implementation progress, *we recommend that the AWC work with the ASN and WSG community to develop, communicate and facilitate a formal process within six months of approval of this report to solicit input from WSGs for the WFL Implementation Review process.*

2.3.2 Developing Water Policy

Government policy is the course of action that a government has agreed to take. Policy can also guide the actions of municipalities, land-use planners, resource managers, landowners and individuals. It can be developed and applied on a provincial, regional or local basis.

Under WFL, the GOA commits to involving Albertans in developing provincial water policy. It does this, in part, by seeking input from the WFL partnerships. All WFL partnerships and their sector members can support the development of good water policy. In fact, effectiveness is improved and redundancy and cost are reduced if the partnerships work together on the same issues at the same time.

The AWC was established to provide multi-stakeholder consensus-based recommendations on provincial-scale water management policy issues. These recommendations are considered by the GOA when developing provincial water policy. However, not all sectors are aware of the role the AWC plays, or how they can get involved. For example, the AWC has a statement of opportunity process available to stakeholders and other partnerships to bring issues forward to the AWC for consideration.[7] The AWC needs to raise awareness of this process.

How does the Environmental Sector provide policy advice?

To collect input on water policy from their sector, AWC members representing the Environmental community participate in the Alberta Environmental Network's *Water Caucus*. This caucus holds monthly calls to discuss topics of concern. AWC members then carry this input forward from the caucus to the AWC table. For more information on the AEN water caucus, see http://www.aenweb.ca/caucuses.

How are WPACs providing policy advice to the AWC?

To provide input into *the AWC Water Allocation Transfer System Upgrade Project*, four WPACs in the South Saskatchewan Watershed worked together. As part of this collaboration, the Bow River Basin Council hosted a workshop for WPACs, WSGs, and other sectors including municipalities, irrigation districts and others. Documentation of the workshop results helped inform the WPAC response presented to the AWC.

6 For more on the WFL Implementation Review, see http://www.albertawatercouncil.ca/Projects/WaterforLifeImplementationReview/tabid/102/Default.aspx .

7 For more information on the AWC Statement of Opportunity process, see http://www.albertawatercouncil.ca/AboutUs/BringingForwardanIssue/tabid/113/Default.aspx.

The Bow River Basin Watershed Stewardship Coordination Committee

In the Bow Basin, a Watershed Stewardship Coordination Committee of WSGs, individual stewards and government agencies has been formed. This committee, sponsored by the Bow River Basin Council and chaired by a WPAC Board member, provides an opportunity for WSGs to have a voice on matters pertaining to watershed stewardship, management and implementation in the Bow Basin. With the help of the BRBC, the WSCC also organizes an annual Stewardship Forum that promotes and showcases local stewardship. More information about this initiative is available at www.brbc.ab.ca.

Showing and Sharing!

The Moose Lake Watershed Society, in partnership with the Beaver River Watershed Alliance, hosts the *Stewardship Show & Share* which is a biennial gathering where all of the WSGs within the Beaver River Basin get together to present and discuss their successes, concerns, and other issues.

Recommendation 8

To improve awareness of its processes for gathering policy input, *we recommend that the AWC inform its members, other WFL partnerships and other sectors and stakeholders about their processes for bringing issues forward within six months of approval of this report.*

Once policy recommendations are made, partnerships need feedback on how the recommendations are considered. The GOA often provides verbal updates on its review of AWC recommendations to the AWC board but this feedback is not formally communicated to other partnerships and interested stakeholders. It would also be useful if the partnerships were aware of what policy issues the AWC and GOA will be examining in the coming year to help partnerships more effectively align their strategic planning.

The GOA could improve communication about how it is responding to the recommendations it receives by providing timely updates to all its WFL partnerships, indicating what AWC, WPAC or other policy recommendations it has received and reviewed, considered, adopted or rejected and why; and what policy issues and partnership recommendations it will be reviewing in the near future. Where recommendations are directed to another sector, that sector could also report back to the AWC on its response.

Recommendation 9

To improve reporting on how policy recommendations have been considered, *we recommend that any sector receiving recommendations from the AWC, WPACs and any other source, provide an annual update to its WFL partnerships indicating what policy recommendations it has received in the past and what action has been taken.*

To improve sector and public understanding of their role, the partnerships should communicate more effectively what recommendations they are making, to whom, and what the response is.

Recommendation 10

To broaden awareness of the partnership role to provide recommendations to the GOA on policy and watershed planning, *we recommend that the AWC, WPACs and WSGs annually (starting in 2012) communicate GOA responses to their recommendations to a broader sector audience of affected stakeholders by posting responses on their website and generally making them available upon request with the understanding that the other partnerships will also share this information with their memberships.*

WPACs are affected by existing policy and may also identify policy gaps (e.g. management of riparian areas). They can contribute to developing policy recommendations through their own work (e.g. the Bow River Basin Council Policy and Legislation Committee) and by participating on the AWC board and its project teams.

Additionally, WPACs may collect information on issues common to several WSGs. However, not all WPACs have a formal process to communicate with the WSGs in their basin (e.g. a WSG coordinator, joint committee or meeting) or the mechanism may not be effective for identifying shared concerns on policy priorities and needs. It is important that all WPACs formalize a process to communicate effectively with the WSGs in their basin.

Recommendation 11

To ensure that WSGs have the opportunity to provide input on shared water issues, *we recommend that each WPAC develop a mechanism within the next year to engage and seek input from the WSGs in their watershed.*

It is also important that WPACs get together to discuss common issues across the province. WPACs have several methods of getting together, but do not have a formal process for prioritizing issues to take forward to the AWC.

Recommendation 12

To prioritize issues common across watersheds, *we recommend that the WPACs collectively develop a process within the next 18 months to determine which issues are appropriate to take forward to the AWC for consideration.*

Although affected by water policy as it is applied on-the-ground, WSGs are not necessarily aware they can provide input on provincial water issues. While they do not have a direct connection with the AWC, WSGs can work through AWC members, WPACs and other sectors and stakeholders to provide input to the development of policy recommendations.

Recommendation 13

To support WSGs to identify shared or common issues, *we recommend that the ASN use its needs assessment process, annual workshop, or other mechanisms to provide a forum for discussion of WSG water issues, and to encourage WSGs to work with their WPAC on bringing these issues forward annually.*

How are WSGs Discussing Common Issues?

Since 2006, the ASN has held the *Stewards-in-Motion* workshop in different parts of the province to showcase local stewardship activities and to promote information-sharing among WSGs. With attendance by WSGs, WPACs, GOA and other stakeholders, this workshop provides an opportunity to share and discuss beneficial management practices for improving watershed stewardship.

WPAC+WSG=Success!

The Red Deer River Watershed Alliance held its 5th Annual Watershed Stewardship Group workshop on Feb. 16, 2011. This workshop met a need of WSGs by including an interactive session on Volunteer Motivation and Volunteer Burn-out Prevention. The workshop also included a series of presentations by WSGs on their challenges and successes. One of the workshop attendees commented that he *"applauded the RDRWA for elevating the profile of the Watershed Stewardship groups, for working consistently to gather them together and for providing excellent networking and learning in the process."*

Taking A NEWT Approach!

The Municipal District of Bonnyville is currently creating a Northeast Watershed Team (NEWT). *NEWT* will be an education and information group for the purpose of making contacts, creating connections and keeping all members up to date and educated, on legislation, policies, etc. Eventually, eight local municipalities, three WPACs, provincial government representatives, local WSGS, agriculture groups and other NGOs will be invited to participate, with the intent of breaking down the barriers and opening doors to allow for communication between multiple groups and levels.

The WSG community is large and diverse, with more than 140 organizations working independently across Alberta. Communications between these groups and between these groups and the other WFL partnerships is a challenge. The Alberta Stewardship Network has played, and can continue to play, a key supporting role to the WSG community.

Recommendation 14

To strengthen its role as a support tool for the WSG community and the WFL partnership system, *we recommend that the ASN continue to provide a portal for WSGs to access information on other partnership activities in Alberta and beyond, and that they continue to showcase to other partnerships and to the broader provincial and national stewardship community, the good work of Alberta's stewardship groups and how it supports the achievement of WFL on an ongoing basis.*

And finally, there may be situations, such as for this project, where it is appropriate for the AWC to seek representation from the WSG community on project teams. Currently, the AWC does not have a process to solicit WSG representation on its project teams.

Recommendation 15

To improve opportunities for WSG input on water issues, *we recommend that the AWC work with the ASN and the WSG community to develop a process within six months of report approval to select members to represent WSGs on AWC project teams, where appropriate.*

2.4 WFL Implementation Challenges

This project identified several WFL implementation challenges related to the work of the partnerships. While it was beyond the scope of this project to identify, explore or resolve implementation challenges, an improved communication and collaboration system that fully utilizes the adaptive management approach and has clear processes for bringing issues forward may be one way to resolve these and other challenges. This list of challenges is not exhaustive and no effort was made to fully explore or prioritize the issues.

These challenges are noted below and described in greater detail in Appendix 3. To ensure they receive further consideration, this list will be forwarded to the AWC *WFL Implementation Review Committee*. Ideally, this will lead to champions, processes and actions to resolve these issues, which include:

- Nesting Watershed and other Planning Initiatives;
- Protecting Aquatic Areas;
- Promoting Best Management Practices; and
- Sharing Knowledge about New and Emerging Issues.

Conclusion

Communications is a broad subject area and much is currently being communicated between the WFL partnerships. However, there is room for improvement. This project was an opportunity to step back from day-to-day operations and look at the overarching WFL communication system. The result is this report, which identifies gaps and makes recommendations to address them. Once these recommendations are implemented over the next 24 months, the WFL partnerships will have a more robust process for communicating, coordinating and, where it is synergistic, collaborating (see implementation schedule in Appendix 4). The recommendations, if implemented, will be the platform to address outstanding implementation issues and to improve cooperation.

Resources will be needed to implement these recommendations, particularly to meet the challenges faced by WSGs, as they will likely have the least capacity to participate in the enhanced communication activities being proposed. A coordinated effort to ensure such resources are found would be beneficial. Where resources are insufficient, shared strategic priorities should be determined and acted on as soon as possible.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AWC	Alberta Water Council
BMPs	Best Management Practices
BRBC	Bow River Basin Council
GOA	Government of Alberta
LUF	Land-use Framework
NEWT	Northeast Watershed Team
NGO	Non-Government Organization
SEAWA	South East Alberta Watershed Alliance
WFL	Water for Life
WPAC	Watershed Planning and Advisory Council
WSCC	Watershed Stewardship Coordinating Committee
WSG	Watershed Stewardship Group

Appendix 1
Team Membership

Member	Organization	Representing
Bob Cameron	South Peace Environmental Association	Environmental Sector
Les Gammie	North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance	WPAC – board member
Margaret Glasford	Past-member Gull Lake Management Society and Alberta Stewardship Network	WSG perspective
Earl Graham	County of Clearwater	Rural Governments
Curtis Horning	Alberta Environment	Government of Alberta
Brian Ilnicki	Land Stewardship Centre of Canada	Alberta Stewardship Network Program
Lisa Maria Fox	Bow River Basin Council	WPAC – board member
Bob Phillips	SEAWA - South East Alberta Watershed Alliance	WPAC – staff member
Shirley Pickering	Highwood Management Plan Public Advisory Committee / Alberta Stewardship Network	Alberta Stewardship Network – board member
David Samm	Battle River Watershed Alliance	WPAC – staff member
Terry Sly	Alberta Water Council	AWC – staff member
Judy Stewart	Alberta Lake Management Society	Lake Environment Conservation Sector
Sharon Willianen	Alberta Environment	Government of Alberta
Jamie Wuite	Alberta Water Council	AWC – board member

Appendix 2
List of Communication Tools Used by WFL Partnerships

Category	TOOLS	GOA	AWC	WPACs	WSGs
Static Communication (broad audience)	Websites	√	√	√	√
	Brochures, fact sheets, reports	√	√	√	√
	News releases, media articles, billboards, TV, radio	√	√	√	√
	Bylaws, process guides	√	√	√	√
	Information centres	√			
	Displays	√	√	√	√
Targeted one-way information (target is mostly membership but may also include members of other partnerships)	Newsletters or other mail-outs		√	√	√
	Case examples				√
	Listings, directories				√
	Business plans and annual reports	√	√	√	√
	Members' AGMs, conferences, forums, events		√	√	√
	Open houses			√	
	Presentations	√	√	√	√
	Letters or reports submitted to GOA		√	√	
	Briefing binders		√		
	Development of frameworks, standards, definitions	√	√	√	
Two-way information exchange between two partnerships	Polls				√
	Email distribution lists	√	√	√	√
	Exchange of reports				√
	Statement of opportunity or other processes to bring an issue to a board		√		
	Training, technical support	√		√	√
Two-way strategic collaboration	Joint project teams or committee		√	√	
	Consultation through workshops, surveys	√	√	√	
	Financial or technical support for another partnership's activities			√	
	Seats on the board		√	√	√
	Funding agreements	√	√	√	√

Appendix 3
WFL Implementation Challenges

One outcome of this project was the identification of several WFL implementation challenges that need further consideration. These issues were beyond the scope of the project, but are described here and will be provided via this report to the AWC *WFL Implementation Review Committee* for their consideration. This list is not exhaustive and no effort was made to fully explore or prioritize the issues.

3.1 Nesting Watershed and other Planning Initiatives

A major responsibility of the partnerships identified in *Water for Life* is to contribute to adaptive watershed management by carrying out an iterative process for assessing watershed health, setting objectives and actions in a plan, and monitoring and reporting that objectives are being met.

The GOA is responsible for developing the legislation and frameworks that guide watershed assessment, planning and monitoring. The GOA also reviews and approves water management plans and endorses water*shed* management plans; may provide technical staff and financial support to watershed and sub-basin assessment and planning exercises; and carries out monitoring activities. The current GOA *Framework for Water Management Planning* provides guidance for these activities. Although it is an informative document it is also confusing in its terminology (e.g. what is an "approved plan" versus "plan"). It is also unclear how the existing framework, written prior to WFL, can be applied to the expanded watershed approach. Currently, the GOA is producing a Framework for *Watershed* Management Planning. Communications about this framework and how it impacts the work of the partnerships would be very beneficial.

The AWC is not directly involved in watershed management activities but may, through its multi-stakeholder consensus-based processes, develop guidance, definitions, or other pieces of knowledge to support such work. WPACs play a key role in conducting state of the watershed assessments and developing objectives in a watershed management plan. WPACs may get involved in doing or supporting sub-basin planning. They also engage stakeholders and the public in these activities, using a number of educational and outreach tools such as websites, newsletters, open houses, workshops, etc. This engagement is particularly important as plans near completion and need various sectors to champion and implement plan actions.

WSGs may contribute to a WPAC state of the watershed report or watershed management plan or may carry out their own sub-basin planning and assessment using a process similar to that of WPACs. It is important that WPACs and WSGs are aware of each other's planning initiatives and that both are aligned with and support WFL outcomes. WSGs also do a great deal of education and outreach to get stakeholder support and to encourage individual behavioural change.

Both WFL and the Land-Use Framework (LUF) are provincial initiatives that involve regional planning. The GOA may also develop objectives for water management frameworks and cumulative effects management strategies. Similarly, municipalities and industry may develop land-use and resource management plans (e.g. municipal development plans, forest management plans, integrated land use plans). It is currently unclear how these planning initiatives nest, or fit, with one another.

The AWC is not directly involved in integrating land and water management. However, it is cognizant that any water policy developed must be congruent with other GOA land-use initiatives. As water is an indicator of the cumulative impact of all that happens on the land, WPACs have a large role to play in integrating land and water management. To do this, key stakeholders, including provincial and municipal land use managers are brought into the watershed planning process to ensure buy-in and support for implementation. Similarly, WSGs undertaking sub-basin planning include land-use managers, particularly municipalities and local industries (disposition holders) in sub-basin planning.

Where such planning initiatives overlap, open and transparent communication and information-sharing protocols between participants are needed. For example, where water or watershed management plans exist, the GOA has shared these documents with the regional LUF planning bodies for consideration. To some degree, the LUF Secretariat has discussed LUF and WFL integration with the partnerships and other sectors and stakeholders. Also, the GOA and AWC continue to encourage provincial and municipal land managers to be involved in regional and local planning initiatives by participating in WPAC and WSG initiatives. WPACs and WSGs can showcase how they are already addressing cumulative effects (a goal of both WFL and the LUF) through their adaptive management approach of watershed assessment and planning.

3.2 Protecting Aquatic Areas

A key goal of *Water for Life* is healthy aquatic ecosystems. To achieve this goal, aquatic areas need to be maintained, or if they become degraded, they must be restored.

WSGs play a large role as the "on-the-ground" bodies who undertake a variety of projects such as riparian assessments and shoreline clean-ups that contribute to maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems. Municipalities, conservation organizations, and industry also play a role in protection and mitigation using tools such as setbacks, easements, storm and wastewater management, utilizing best management practices around water bodies and water crossings.

WPACs help to identify aquatic areas that need restoration through their watershed assessments, or they may establish aquatic health objectives in their watershed management plans. They may also support the on-the-ground activities of WSGs or undertake such work themselves. The AWC indirectly supports this work by striking project teams to examine policy issues affecting healthy aquatic ecosystems. Teams might provide clarity by developing definitions or other guidance. The AWC can also assist its sector members to better communicate their roles and activities in support of achieving healthy aquatic ecosystems.

GOA staff may undertake reclamation activities themselves or provide financial and/or technical support to WSGs or other conservation organizations (e.g. Alberta Lake Management Society) to carry out these activities. The GOA is responsible for enforcing the various provincial Acts to protect and prevent the degradation of aquatic ecosystems. As such, the GOA may use a variety of tools (e.g. fact sheets, web pages, maps, inventories, frameworks, performance indicators) to undertake work on and communicate their protection and mitigation priorities to WPACs, WSGs and other interested stakeholders.

While there are many local initiatives to protect and restore aquatic ecosystems around the province, it is unclear who is the provincial lead, and what guidance, support or tools they can provide to WSGs and WPACs

to carry out these activities. Additionally, the partnerships need clear communications on the provincial direction for wetland protection, riparian area protection, setting instream flow needs, protecting fisheries, and other matters. It is also unclear what the federal role is in protecting aquatic ecosystems.

3.3 Promoting Best Management Practices

Water for Life recognizes that successful water management requires a suite of both regulatory and non-regulatory tools. Promoting best management practices (BMPs), an important tool to prevent the degradation of water resources and aquatic ecosystems, is a non-regulatory approach that is championed by all of the partnerships.

The GOA, industry, academia and others may develop new BMPs and communicate them via information centres, reports, newsletters, workshops, pamphlets, and other means. In turn, WFL partnerships can share this information with their networks. The AWC has done considerable work developing BMPs for water conservation, efficiency and productivity planning. WPACs and WSGs, through their education and outreach activities, share knowledge of and promote BMPs, particularly for municipal and agricultural stakeholders. They may also identify BMP gaps and facilitate affected parties in filling such gaps. However, there is currently no formal mechanism to identify priority BMP development and communication needs or who will lead such activities.

3.4 Sharing Knowledge about New and Emerging Issues

The *Water for Life* strategy recognizes knowledge as a key element for successful achievement of the strategy's goals and outcomes. All of the partnerships require information and all of them are contributing to the province's collective knowledge. Often, the need for knowledge is related to a new or emerging water or watershed management issue. Hence the GOA carries out research in-house and through its support of the Alberta Water Research Institute.

The AWC also develops knowledge and expertise on specific water issues via its project teams who may contract additional research on a specific topic. Similarly, WPACs and WSGs develop many technical reports on existing, new and emerging regional and local issues via committees and contracts.

While there are a few good examples, such as the ASN Awareness to Actions booklet, the WFL partnership system lacks processes and tools for documenting experiences and lessons learned and sharing information and knowledge among the partnerships. This lack of coordination can lead to duplication of effort and waste of scarce resources. There is also a lack of technical frameworks, standards, protocols, shared definitions, and accessible databases to ensure that work is done to the same standard and is comparable between initiatives.

Future work might include examining the need for an Alberta water/watershed resource centre that provides human support, resources for watershed management, planning tools, databases, education and outreach as part of an improved information management strategy. The establishment of such a centre would likely help to address many of the issues identified above.

Appendix 4
Lead and Timelines for Recommendation Implementation

Recommendation (No.)	Lead	Other Partners	Q3 2011	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012
Process to move WSG issues forward to WPACs (13)	ASN	WSGs, WPACs	Annually					
Portal to showcase WSG contributions (14)	ASN	WSGs	Ongoing					
Mechanism to collect WSG input (11)	WPACs	WSGs	Within 12 months					
Process to move WPAC issues forward to AWC (12)	WPACs	AWC	Within 18 months					
Process for WSG input on implementation (7)	AWC	WSGs, ASN	Within 6 months					
Inform others about their processes (8)	AWC	All	Within 6 months					
Process for selecting WSG team members (15)	AWC	WSGs, ASN	Within 6 months					
WFL Implementation report (2)	GOA	All	Biennially					
Commence a marketing strategy (3)	GOA	All			Start within 6 months			
WFL partnerships meeting (6)	GOA	All	Annually					
Update websites (1)	All		Twice a year					
Discuss organizing shared learning session (4)	All		Biennially					
Add WFL Partnership links page to website (5)	All		Within 6 months					
Update on recommendation actions (9)	All		Annually					
Communicate recommendation responses (10)	All				Annually starting in 2012			

ALBERTA WATER COUNCIL
Website: www.AWChome.ca